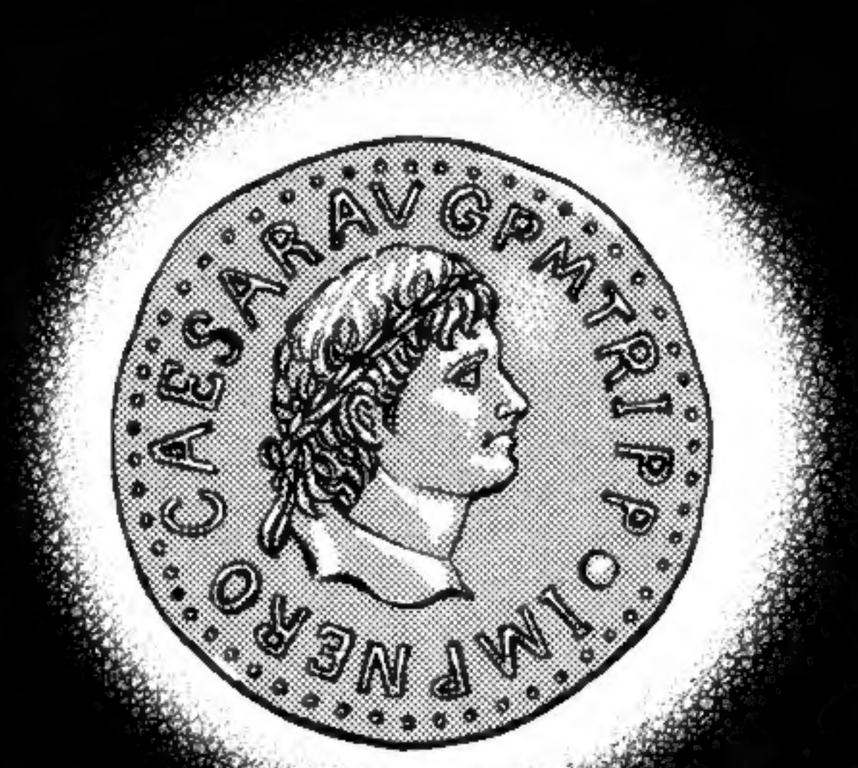
CHAPTER LIX: DREAMS

EXCERPT FROM NERO'S INAUGRAL SPEECH.



"MY BOYHOOD HAD NOT HAD THE TAINT OF CIVIL WARS OR DOMESTIC FEUDS. I BRING WITH ME NO HATREDS, NO SENSE OF WRONG, NO DESIRE OF VENGEANCE."

NEXT WE MUST SWEEP OVER THE VARIOUS PROVINCES WITH CULTURE!

ROME'S UNPARALLED MILITARY MIGHT HAS SUBJUGATED THE WORLD, YET...

AS THE SUPREME POWER, IS NOW NOT THE TIME WE WORKED TO DO AWAY WITH THE CULTURE OF OTHER GREAT NATIONS?

IS THAT ENOUGH?

MILITARY MIGHT ALONE IS NOT STRENGTH!

IT IS THE CIVILISED ARTS WHICH ARE A BLADE WITH WHICH WE CAN PIERCE HUMAN HEARTS THROUGHOUT TIME.

WOULD A TRULY RIGHTEOUS PATH CARRY WITH IT THE EMOTION AND ENVY BROUGHT FROM PAIN AND DESPAIR?

EVEN IF WE SUBJUGATE OUR OPPONENTS VIA FORCE, AN UNSEEMLY HATE WILL STILL REMAIN.

PLEASE, TRY AND THINK IT OVER.

WHAT WAS THAT?

BURRUS - PREFECT OF THE PRAETORIAN GUARD

IMPERATOR. I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR SOMETHING CONCRETE ON THIS MATTER!*

* ONE OF THE ROMAN EMPEROR'S SPECIFIC ROLES... WAS TO BE THE HEAD OF THE ROMAN ARMY.

DO YOU INTEND TO SWAP THE SWORDS OF THOSE ON THE FRONT LINES FOR FLUTES?

SENECA - PHILOSOPHER

フゥ...

AND IF THAT IS SO, SHOULDN'T YOU DISMANTLE THE ARMY, AND BEGIN THE TRAINING OF MASTER MUSICIANS TO PROTECT OUR LANDS?

I AM SAYING THAT, IN THESE PEACEFUL TIMES, WE MUST SEARCH FOR APPROPRIATE METHODS!

I AM NOT PROPOSING THE CURTAIL OF ARMS!

EVEN FOR ONE IN THE ARMY...

AND YET I IMAGINE THAT YOUR MAJESTY HAS NO CLUE...

AS TO THE NUMBERS OF SOLDIERS WHO SACRIFICED THEMSELVES TO ATTAIN SAID PEACE!

SUCH SARCASM IS QUITE UNREFINED!

LET HIM TALK FIRST...

THAT IS A CUREL COMMENT TO MAKE TO HIS MAJESTY, WHO HAS NEVER BEEN TO A BATTLEFIELD.

NOW NOW, SIR BURRUS.

HE'S TALKING ABOUT GREECE AGAIN...

GOOD GRIEF.

AT THE HEIGHT OF ITS GLORY, THE CITY STATE OF GREECE...

YES, LET'S RETURN TO THE TALK.

THE GAMES HELPED BRING ABOUT AN IMPARTIAL SPORTING COMPETITIVENESS BETWEEN STATES. THEY STOOD AS A REPLACEMENT FOR WAR WHICH HUMANITY SHOULD BE PROUD OF!

THAT WAS THE OLYMPIC GAMES.

WOULD HOLD AN EVENT TO CELEBRATE THE PEACE BETWEEN CITY STATES...

• THE OLYMPICS WOULD CONTINUE TO BE HELD IN GREECE EVEN AFTER IT BECAME A PROVINCE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

WOULDN'T IT BE WONDERFUL?!

THATS EXACTLY IT SENECA!

HOLDING A SIMILARILY LARGE TOURNAMENT IN ROME?

SO YOUR MAJESTY, YOU'RE PLANNING ON...

...

THEN WHY NOT BROADEN PROCEEDINGS?

THERE IS NO NEED TO SIMPLY STICK TO ATHLETICS, THE CONTESTS COULD INVOLVE MUSIC AND POETRY TOO.

IT COULD BE THE "NERO FESTIVAL", DEDICATED TO THE ARTS.

THE DIFFERENCE IN SCALE BETWEEN THE GREEK FEDERATION AND ROME'S CURRENT DOMINION IS FAR TOO GREAT.

STILL YOUR MAJESTY...

TCH.

I SEE, SO WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH THAT TALK OF TAX WHICH YOU WERE ON ABOUT BEFORE?

WHAT YOU HAVE SAID IS CERTAINLY A FINE IDEAL SIRE.

HAAH...

WE COULD SHOW OURSELVES OFF AS AN EXEMPLARY, DEVELOPED NATION.

WOULDN'T IT BE FAR MORE SUBLIME THAN CONTESTS OF FORCE?

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MUSTN'T WE FIRST SOLVE THE BUDGETARY ISSUES WHICH LIE BEFORE US?

BUT TO MAKE YOUR DREAM A REALITY WE FIRST NEED MONEY!

YOUR MAJESTY!

WE CAN'T!

IF THAT'S SO SIMPLY WRING WHAT WE NEED FROM THOSE NEWLY INTO WEALTH!

ARE YOU AWARE OF WHO THIS BUST REPRESENTS?

PLEASE TAKE A LOOK.

AND NONE OTHER THAN YOUR MAJESTY'S OWN...

HER MAJESTY AGRIPPINA'S ELDER BROTHER...

GAIUS CAESAR AUGUSTUS...

MORE COMMONLY KNOWN AS CALIGULA...

UNCLE!

THAT'S...

HE BECAME EMPEROR AT THE YOUNG AGE OF 25. DURING HIS REIGN HE WAS KNOWN FOR HIS TERRIFYING ECCENTRICITY, AND THE PURGES WHICH HE WOULD CARRY OUT. THIS WOULD MAKE HIM THE PREEMINENT TYRANT IN ROMAN HSITORY.

THE THIRD GENERATION EMPEROR. HE IS MOST COMMONLY KNOWN BY HIS NICKNAME, CALIGULA, INSTEAD OF HIS ACTUAL NAME, GAIUS.

GAIVS CAESAR

HE WAS DOGGED BY NUMEROUS SCANDALS, AND WOULD BE ASSASSINATED AT THE TENDER AGE OF 28. HE WAS THE FIRST EMPEROR TO MEET SUCH A FATE.

SHORTLY AFTER TAKING OFFICE IT IS SAID THAT HE SUFFERED A GREAT ILLNESS, WHICH RUINED HIS MIND, THOUGH THE TRUTH IS UNKNOWN.

* A CALIGULA WAS A TYPE OF MILITARY BOOT.

CALIGULA FOUND HIMSELF RATHER IRONICALLY...

KILLED BY HIS OWN PRAETORIAN GUARD, WHO WERE MEANT TO PROTECT HIM.

SWISH

AIMING TO BE POPULAR WITH THE COMMON PEOPLE, HE SPENT EXORBITANT AMOUNTS ON GREAT ATTRACTIONS.

HE ALSO INDULGED HIMISLF IN ALL MANNER OF LAVICIOUS PLEASURES.

THE EMPEROR CALIGULA WAS FUNDAMENTALLY MISTAKEN IN HIS NOTION OF POLITICS.

THUS...

HE BEGAN TO BELIEVE IN HIS OWN DEIFICATION, AND THAT ANY RECKLESS ACTIONS WOULD BE PERMISSABLE...

PLEASE, DO NOT EVEN JOKE ABOUT SUCH MATTERS...!

YOUR MAJESTY!

I SHALL KEEP AN EYE OUT LEST YOU TRY AND STAB ME YOURSELF!

I KNOW ALL ABOUT IT MY GOOD BURRUS.

I AM DIFFERENT TO CALIGULA.

I SWEAR, BY NO MEANS WILL I EVER BECOME A TYRANT!

YOU NEED NOT WORRY.

I, NERO, AM AN EMPEROR BELOVED BY THE PEOPLE.

...

I WILL DEFINITELY BRING ABOUT MY FESTIVAL!

I WILL NOT ABANDON MY PLANS!

...

HOW ODD...

I THOUGHT I'D HEARD A MEETING YET...

IS NO ONE HERE?

OH.

BROTHER...!

!

I SUDDENLY FEEL RATHER UNWELL.

WOULD YOU TELL NERO I WILL BE UNABLE TO ATTEND THIS EVENING'S OUTING...

YOUR PALANQUIN HAS BEEN PREPARED.

MY LADY AGRIPPINA...

YOUR MAJE-STY?

BESIDS THAT, I HAVE ANOTHER REQUEST.

ANY PHYSICIAN WILL DO!

I SHALL CALL FOR ONE OF THE PALACE'S PHYSICIANS AT ONCE. PLEASE BE PATIENT.

AS YOU WISH!

STORE THIS BUST SOMEWHERE OUT OF SIGHT IN THE BASEMENT!

WOULD YOU PLEASE...

WHEN THE SUN SETS VISIBILITY WILL WORSEN TOO.

LET US EACH FULFILL OUR DUTIES WITHOUT NEGLIGENCE!

WHILE TRAVELLING WITH THE PALANQUIN WE SHALL NARROW DOWN THE PERSONNEL TO JUST US.

IN ORDER TO REMAIN INCONSPICUOUS WE HAVE CHOSEN TO STICK TO THE BACK SREETS.

OF COURSE, VICE COMMANDER!

YOU'RE TO BE ENTRUSTED WITH LADY OCTAVIA'S PALANQUIN ITSELF.

WHATEVER HAPPENS, DO NOT FIND YOURSELF AWAY FROM IT.

UNDERSTOOD RUSKA?

SHE MERELY HAD SOME IMPORTANT BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO, PREVENTING HER FROM JOINING YOUR OUTING.

YOU'VE NO NEED TO WORRY.

SO WAS SOMETHING THE MATTER WITH MOTHER'S CONDITION?

OH REALLY...

COULDN'T I JUST GO OUT AND HAVE SOME FUN BY MYSELF THEN?

WHAT A MELANCHOLY COUNTENANCE.

SHE'S SPLENDIDLY DRESSED UP TO GO OUT AND ENJOY HERSELF YET...

BORN TO A WELL OFF FAMILY IN THE CAPITAL...

SHE FOUND HERSELF EMPRESS WHILE STILL ONLY 14.

LADY OCTAVIA...

IT SEEMS HER POLITICAL MARRIAGE...

HAS BEEN A SAD ONE...

IMPOSSIBLE DREAMS...

HOW STRANGE THAT I, THE ONE WHO WAS UNABLE TO PROTECT MY BELOVED...

AM HERE PROTECTING A COUPLE LOCKED IN A LOVELESS MARRIAGE.

PERHAPS HAPPINESS IS JUST A SPECTRE...

MAYBE WE ALL MUST DESIRE A CERTAIN SOMETHING...

TO HELP FILL THAT HIDDEN THIRST IN OUR HEARTS, YET IT IS NEVER ENOUGH...

WHO KNOWS WHAT I WOULD'VE DREAMED OF WITH VALERIA?

!

NO, WAIT.

IF IT'S HERE THEN...

HE'S GONE TO CHECK ON OUR PATH! QUICK WITTED AS ALWAYS.

ARE THEY AIMING TO PINCER US IN THIS ALLEY?

THERE'S STILL WASHING OUT. I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL SOMETHING'S WRONG.

THE SUN HAS SET AND YET...

VICE COMMAN-DER!

FOR A WHILE NOW A NUMBER OF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TAILING US ON AND OFF.

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SOME-THING'S OFF...

IT'S A TRAP!

!

PROTECT THE PALANQUIN!

THEY'RE COMING FROM ABOVE!

DON'T LET IT FALL, HOLD IT UP!

GYAAH!

GUAAH!

KYAAAH!

KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN YOUR MAJESTY!

THE ROOF IS SOLID, SO DON'T COME FROM UNDER IT!

WH...

WH...

WHAT IS THIS?!

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YOU'LL HAVE NO FORGIVENESS.

NOW, BRING IT.

MORE ARE COMING FROM BEHIND!

I'LL DEAL WITH THEM!

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ズリュ!!

WH... WHERE ARE YOU?

ROX-ANNE!

ムク..

ガタ ガタ..

EEK...!

ズル!!

LADY OCTAVIA, YOU MUSTN'T COME OUTSIDE!

RUSKA!

SHIT!

HUFF...

Z...

?!

GUH.

I'LL BE KIL...

カチ//"

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EH?!

BEG-GING YOUR PARDON!

EH... WHAT?

WH...

STO...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, SIR RUSKA?

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ARE YOU UNHARMED YOUR MAJESTY?!

YES.

EEH... P... PROB-ABLY...

HAD ONE BY ANY CHANCE EVEN GRAZED YOU...

IT WOULD'VE BEEN A RACE AGAINST TIME TO HAVE THE POISON TREATED...

MY HUMBLEST APOLOGIES, LADY OCTAVIA.

THEY WERE USING POISON ARROWS TO TRY AND ASSASSINATE YOU.

THUMP.

THUMP.

THUMP.

AREN'T I, NERO, AN EMPEROR BELOVED BY HIS PEOPLE?!

I'M INNOCENT...

I'VE CAUSED NO ONE REASON TO RESENT ME!

WHY?!